Draft Environmental Assessment

Arcadia Temporary Housing Site

DeSoto County, Florida

FEMA-1539-DR-FL

September 2004

FEMA

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The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) proposes to fund an emergency temporary housing project, placing up to 150 manufactured homes (trailer homes) on land zoned for agricultural use located south of Fiveash Road, north of E. Gibson Road, west of N.E. Turner Street and about ¼ mile east of U.S. Highway 17 in Arcadia, De Soto County, Florida. These homes would temporarily house people displaced by Hurricane Charley in August 2004.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) documents the proposed project's purpose and need (Section 1) and the investigation and evaluation of proposed project alternatives (Section 2), the existing human and natural environment (Section 3), and the proposed alternatives' expected environmental consequences (Section 4).

This EA has been prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the President's Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1800), and FEMA's regulations implementing NEPA (44 CFR 10.9). Based on the evaluation described herein, FEMA has concluded that the proposed project would not have significant adverse environmental consequences.

1. Proposed Project Purpose and Need

Hurricane Charley, a category four hurricane with storm surges of 10 to 15 feet, moved across the Florida peninsula in August 2004. The hurricane made landfall near Punta Gorda, Charlotte County, traveled northeastward, and exited into the Atlantic Ocean near Daytona Beach, Volusia County. An estimated 2.4 million persons evacuated. About 1.1 million customers lost electricity in 21 counties. The President signed a disaster declaration (FEMA-1539-DR-FL) on August 13, 2004, authorizing FEMA to provide federal assistance in designated areas of Florida.

FEMA proposes to administer federal disaster assistance funds per the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 USC 5121-5206, as amended (Stafford Act). Stafford Act Section 408 authorizes FEMA's Individual Assistance Program to provide emergency temporary housing for disaster victims whose homes are uninhabitable. FEMA has identified the need to provide temporary housing for residents in DeSoto County.

2. Proposed Project Alternatives

NEPA requires investigation and evaluation of reasonable project alternatives as part of the project environmental review process. Two alternatives are addressed in this EA: not doing anything (No Action Alternative) and building temporary housing on land owned by a private landowner on Fiveash Road (Proposed Action). Other locations within DeSoto County were identified and evaluated for development. Factors considered in choosing a site include: site topography, property owner willingness, location with respect to the floodplain, distance to occupants' homes, and past land use. It was determined that the Arcadia Site on Fiveash Road was the only suitable site available under emergency temporary housing time constraints that offered the adequate access to the impacted community in consideration of the site selection factors.

2.1 Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, FEMA would not fund the proposed project. Most hurricane victims would stay with their family and friends, or in schools, churches, motels, or other locations until they can find other housing. This would result in further economic and personal hardships for affected residents, disrupt school attendance and the school system, and further strain the county social and economic infrastructure.

2.2 Alternative 2 – Build Temporary Housing at the Airport Road Site (Proposed Action)

The proposed site is south of Fiveash Road approximately ¼ mile to the east of U.S. Highway 17. It is to the west of the DeSoto Center campus of South Florida Community College in Arcadia, DeSoto County, Florida. FEMA tasked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to build a new manufactured home park (hereafter "Park") of up to 150 units. At this time, Park occupancy is expected to not exceed 24 months. Each home is approximately 14 x 70 feet.

New utilities would be installed, including connecting potable water and sanitary sewer service to existing county infrastructure. A new electric substation or on-site generator would be installed for Park power supply. If an electric substation is chosen, an electric generator may be temporarily installed to provide power during substation construction. Park drainage features would include drainage ditches and one or more on-site retention ponds to treat stormwater as required by the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). The Park would have necessary gravel access roads for built-up areas, and a gravel pad for each home. Roads would be interconnected with the surrounding city and county roads to allow multiple ingress and egress as required. Fiveash Road may be extended east to N.E. Turner Street in order to provide better street access to the site. A safety fence would also be installed around the perimeter, electric generator and/or substation, and around stormwater retention pond(s). When temporary housing need has ended, FEMA expects that the trailers would be hauled from the site, to suitable locations elsewhere (to be determined on case-by-case basis). The Park site would then be seeded and restored to previous conditions and/or used by the county in a manner consistent with its zoning classification.

3 Affected Environment

3.1 Project Location

The project site is located in Arcadia, DeSoto County, in southwestern Florida (Figure 1). The site is approximately ¼ mile to the east of Highway 17 in Section 30, Township 37 South and Range 25 East. It is about 48 miles north of Fort Myers, 126 miles south of Tampa, and 197 miles southwest of Orlando.

3.2 Geology and Soils

The elevation within DeSoto County ranges from very near sea level in the southwest corner along the lower Peace River Valley to about 90 feet above sea level in the northeast corner of the county. The elevation increases almost imperceptibly from the southwest toward the northeast

and the topography tends to be flat with relatively steeper slopes in the vicinity of streams (USDA, 1989).

Most of DeSoto County has a thin mantle consisting of silty, clayey, and shelly sand ranging from 10 to 30 feet thick. The mantle is underlain by the Peace River Formation which consists of phosphatic sand, clayey sand, clay, and dolomite. Below the Peace River Formation lies the Arcadia Formation, which is composed of the Nocatee and Tampa members as well as an unnamed member. These members consist of phosphatic quartz sand, clay, carbonates, quartz sandy limestone, and dolomites (USDA, 1989).

The proposed site is located in the DeSoto Plain, a flat area with wetlands interspersed with pine-palmetto flatwoods. Area soils are typically acidic because of the dominant types of vegetation and lack of underground drainage (SWFWD, 2004). The Smyrna soil component is the predominant soil found at the project site. This soil component consists of fine sand and is poorly drained with the water table usually within 1 foot of the surface (EDR, 2004). The soil meets the requirements for a hydric soil (EDR, 2004). There is also a small area of Immokalee fine sand which also has the water table usually within 1 foot of the surface. The State Soil Conservationist determined that no prime or unique soils exist on the project site in September 21, 2004 correspondence (Appendix).

3.3 Hydrology and Floodplains

The DeSoto County climate is subtropical, with warm, wet summers and mild, relatively dry winters. The county average annual rainfall is 53 inches and can vary considerably from site to site. About 70 percent of the rain falls from April through September (USDA, 1989).

Many swamps, marshes, and ponds are throughout the county. Peace River, Horse Creek, and Joshua Creek are the major streams within the county. The 4 to 6 foot deep drainage ditch that borders the west and south sides of the site flows into the Peace River. A preliminary survey of the Arcadia Site found that the southeast corner of the site is at a lower elevation than the rest of the site. Accordingly, rainfall and runoff is expected to run toward and gather at the southeast corner. Ground water in DeSoto County is obtained from the surficial aquifer system, the intermediate aquifer system, and the Floridan Aquifer. The aquifers are separated by confining layers that restrict vertical water movement between aquifer systems. Groundwater at the project site flows in a west-northwest direction (EDR, 2004).

The FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map shows that part of the possible extension of Fiveash Road east to join N.E. Turner Street is in the 100-year floodplain (Figure 2). The FEMA Region IV Federal Insurance and Mitigation Division confirmed that the project site where the mobile homes would be located is outside of the Special Flood Hazard Area in a written flood determination dated September 20, 2004 (Appendix).

3.4 Wetlands

USACE-Jacksonville District, Tampa Regulatory Field Office wetlands biologists reviewed maps and an aerial photo of the site on September 20, 2004. They determined that the drainage ditch and wetlands on-site are isolated, have no surface hydrologic connection to outside waters (e.g., streams and creeks), and are not adjacent to other wetlands. Based upon this review, it was

determined that there are no jurisdictional wetlands in or near the proposed project site. A determination of no jurisdictional wetlands was submitted by USACE on September 21, 2004 (Appendix). Figure 3 depicts mapped wetlands from the National Wetlands Inventory maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

3.5 Water Quality

The proposed project site is within the Peace River watershed, which has been designated as an "impaired water" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the State of Florida due to levels of nutrients, coliforms, turbidity and low dissolved oxygen (EPA, 2004a). The drainage ditch borders the south and west boundary line of the project area. Based upon the survey results in Section 3.4, it is believed that surface water from the project site eventually outflows to the Peace River.

3.6 Air Quality

DeSoto County is currently in attainment for the six criteria pollutants (ozone, lead, particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide) under the Clean Air Act (CAA) (EPA, 2004b). DeSoto County has been in attainment for the criteria pollutants since records have been kept. The ambient air quality at the project site is very good given DeSoto County's proximity to the Gulf of Mexico's strong air circulation and southwest Florida's low, open topography.

3.6 Vegetation and Wildlife

A field survey was conducted on September 22, 2004. The wooded area included in the northwest portion of the project area include the following: a tree layer of dominated by slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*), a shrub layer consisting primarily of saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) with some scattered cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*) and laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*); and an herbaceous layer of beaked panicgrass (*Panicum anceps*), yellow meadow beauty (*Rhexia lutea*), poison oak (*Toxicodendron* spp.), tickseed (*Coreopsis* spp.), and various sedges (*Carex* spp.). The pasture included herbaceous species such as beaked panicgrass, yellow meadow beauty, pale meadow beauty (*Rhexia mariana*), bunchgrass (*Sporabolus indicus*), shortleaf spikesedge (*Kyllinga brevifolia*), tall elephantsfoot (*Elephantopus elatus*), blackberry (*Rubus cuneifolius*), manyspike flatsedge (*Cyperus polystachyus*), tropical flatsedge (*Cyperus surinamensis*), pine barren flatsedge (*Cyperus retrorsus*), and several isolated individuals of Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*). Brazilian pepper is a non-native, invasive species. All of the species observed during the site reconnaissance are typical of pastureland and pine flatwood communities (Pers. comm., September 22, 2004, Dr. Bruce Hansen, U. of South Florida Herbarium). Figure 4 includes representative photos of site vegetation.

Characteristic wildlife of pine flatwood communities includes the pine woods treefrog (*Hyla femeralis*), eastern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger*), and brown-headed nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*). Wildlife that may be found in cow pastures and the urban/rural interface include cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*), black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*), wood storks (*Mycteria americana*), common raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), striped skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*), eastern cottontails (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), and armadillos (*Dasypus novemcinctus*).

3.7 Threatened and Endangered Species

Per Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) Section 7, USACE initiated consultation with the USFWS Vero Beach Field Office on September 18, 2004. In a communication dated September 18, 2004, the USFWS stated that they have no records of threatened or endangered species or critical habitat within or adjacent to the project site.

However, as a precautionary measure, the USFWS requested that the contractor should implement the USFWS's standard construction protocol for threatened eastern indigo snakes (*Drymarchon corais couperi*) to minimize any potential impacts on the snakes. A copy of this consultation and recommendations are in the Appendix. As a courtesy, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) was consulted on September 20, 2004 regarding this project, and did not express any concerns regarding state-listed species.

3.8 Cultural Resources

No structure was found on the site at the time of the site survey on September 22, 2004. The Florida State Historic Preservation Office (FSHPO) was contacted on September 18, 2004 to determine the potential for historic or archaeological resources at the site. The FSHPO found that no historic properties were recorded on the property and determined that it is unlikely that any are located there. The FSHPO issued an opinion that the proposed project would not likely effect historic properties on September 21, 2004 (Appendix).

3.9 Socioeconomics

The DeSoto County population was estimated to be 32,209 people in 2000 (Census Bureau, 2004). The median household income in 1999 was estimated at $30,714, with 23.6 percent of the population below the poverty line. The median age of the county's population is 36.5 years. For comparison, U.S. median age is 36 years, and Florida median age is 38.7 years.

Executive Order (EO) 12898 (Environmental Justice) requires federal agencies to identify and address the effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations, to avoid disproportionately high and adverse public health or environmental impacts on these populations. EO 12898 also requires federal agencies to ensure that public notifications regarding environmental issues are brief, understandable, and highly accessible.

Within the declared disaster area, the overall population is approximately 73.3 percent white and 26.7 percent minority (Table 1).

Table 1. DeSoto County, Florida Racial Composition

Location	*Race (percent)*				
	White(a)	*Black (a)*	*Hispanic or Latino (b)*	*American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut (a)*	*Other (a)*
DeSoto County	73.3%	12.7%	24.9%	1.6%	10.5%
Florida	65.4%	14.6%	16.8%	0.3%	3.0%

Source: United States Census Bureau, Census 2000. http://factfinder.census.gov

(a) Includes persons reporting only one race

(b) Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in appropriate race categories.

3.10 Safety and Security

Safety and security issues that have been considered in this EA include the health and safety of area residents, the public at large, and personnel involved in activities related to the proposed site development, operation, and closure.

EO 13045 (Protection of Children) requires Federal agencies to make it a high priority to identify and assess environmental health and safety risks that may disproportionately affect children.

3.11 Hazardous Materials and Toxic Wastes

Hazardous materials and toxic wastes are primarily regulated under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), and their reauthorizing amendments, the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA), and the Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments (HSWA). An abbreviated Phase I Environmental Site Assessment for hazardous and toxic waste was done on the proposed project site. This assessment consisted of a search of existing state and federal databases for known problem sites and spill locations. An on-site field survey was conducted on September 22, 2004. No apparent hazardous contamination was found on or near the site.

The database search identified one location near the proposed project site as having reported hazardous materials or waste incidents (Appendix). The DeSoto County School Board Transportation Building about 0.5 miles to the southwest of the site had a leaking underground storage tank that reported a spill of vehicular diesel fuel on September 29, 1993. The site was remediated, and a site rehabilitation completion report was issued on December 21, 1995 (EDR, 2004).

3.12 Traffic and Transportation

The proposed project site fronts Fiveash Road, a 2-lane secondary road, ¼ mile east of U.S. Highway 17, in a rural area on the edge of Arcadia. This part of town is characterized by sections of grazing land interfaced with moderate development, including the DeSoto Center campus of South Florida Community College and DeSoto Memorial Hospital. In a meeting between representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and DeSoto County held on September 18, 2004, DeSoto County officials stated that Fiveash Road is a low traffic road.

Fiveash Road may be extended east to N.E. Turner Street in order to improve ingress and egress to the Park. Both N.E. Turner Street to the east and E. Gibson Road to the south are main thoroughfares providing access to the city of Arcadia and U.S. Highway 17.

4. Environmental Consequences

4.1 Soils

Proposed activities would disturb site soils during construction of utilities, roads, and housing pads, and with resident and visitor foot traffic. Due to the site's low topography the potential for soil erosion and sedimentation is low. Use of best management practices (BMPs) (e.g., installation of silt fences or straw bales) in construction would reduce these adverse impacts. If fill is stored on site as part of home installation or removal, the contractor would be required to appropriately cover it.

4.2 Hydrology and Floodplains

USACE would task the contractor to design the extension of Fiveash Road east to N.E. Turner Street to minimize the impact on the 100-year floodplain. An appropriately sized culvert, or other roadway design feature, would be incorporated in project design plans to accommodate the 100-year floodplain. The rest of the project site is located outside of the floodplain. Therefore, no notable consequences are expected.

4.3 Wetlands

Based upon the USACE determination (Appendix), no jurisdictional wetlands were found at the proposed project site. The drainage ditch that borders the site on the west and south was found to be non-jurisdictional. Therefore, no Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permit would be required. Some non-jurisdictional depressional areas may be filled, resulting in the short-term loss of wetland plant and wildlife species. It is expected that building the retention ponds for on-site stormwater management would provide some long-term replacement for wetland habitat.

4.3 Water Quality

Stormwater flows have the potential to enter the site's drainage ditch that ultimately conveys runoff to the Peace River. In order to minimize pollutants from entering the Peace River watershed, the contractor would be required to implement BMPs, and develop a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan that meets Florida Department of Environment (FDEP) specifications. The construction of stormwater retention ponds on-site would further prevent water pollution from sedimentation.

4.4 Air Quality

If an electric generator is required at the project site, it would be required to meet local, state and federal standards. Any CAA compliance permits for operating generators would be obtained prior to construction.

The proposed project would include activities that would produce a minor, temporary, localized increase in vehicle emissions and dust particles. Tractor-trailers would transport manufactured

homes to the site. Grading equipment would be required for site preparation. While such equipment use would temporarily increase emissions, no long-term air quality impacts are anticipated in DeSoto County. Federal or state air quality attainment levels would not likely be exceeded.

Periodic wetting during construction would help to reduce fugitive dust. Open areas of the temporary housing site would be covered with grass or other material to minimize dust. These mitigation measures would help reduce air quality impacts to asthmatics, seniors, and other sensitive residents such as patients of DeSoto Memorial Hospital, which is located less than one mile to the west of the project site. During home removal, the contractor would be required to periodically wet-down the site. If any fill is stored on site as part of home installation or removal, the contractor would be required to cover it.

4.5 Vegetation and Wildlife

Most site vegetation would be removed and covered with grass species or another material. After housing is removed, the site would naturally re-vegetate with a variety of slash pine, saw palmetto, and herbaceous species, depending on how the county chooses to redevelop the site.

4.6 Threatened and Endangered Species

In correspondence dated September 18, 2004, USFWS determined that the project would have "No Effect" on any ESA listed species in DeSoto County, Florida (Appendix). As a protective measure, the contractor should implement the USFWS' standard construction protocol for eastern indigo snakes.

4.7 Cultural Resources

No cultural resources at the site are expected to be affected by the proposed project. FSHPO concurred with this determination on September 21, 2004 (Appendix). Although no historic properties were identified at the site, in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, should unanticipated historic or cultural materials be found during construction, all construction activities shall cease immediately within 100 feet of the materials until their cultural affiliation and ultimate disposition are determined in consultation with FSHPO, FEMA Region IV, and other interested parties.

4.8 Socioeconomics

The proposed project would benefit people affected by Hurricane Charley. It would also benefit the County by keeping area individuals rebuilding their communities, working, attending school, and paying taxes that support County and community social and economic infrastructure. All forms of FEMA disaster housing assistance are available to any affected household that meets the eligibility conditions. No federal entity or official (or their agent) may discriminate against any individual based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or economic status.

In compliance with EO 12898 (Environmental Justice), the Proposed Action Alternative site selection would pose no disproportionately high and adverse effect on minority and low-income populations.

4.9 Hazardous/Toxic Materials

Site survey and database search revealed no apparent presence of hazardous, toxic or radiological materials or waste. Based on these findings, there is a low potential for exposure of Park residents to these types of materials.

Although no hazardous materials were found on-site, if any are found between start of construction and final Park closure, all hazardous materials shall be either remediated, abated, or disposed of as appropriate, and otherwise handled in accordance with applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations.

4.10 Safety and Security

Under EO 13045 (Protection of Children), the contractor would place fencing around the site perimeter to keep children separated from vehicular traffic on Fiveash Road and E. Gibson Street, around the electrical generator and/or substation to prevent shock and electrocution; and around the stormwater retention pond(s) to prevent access to the water by children and protect them from drowning and other waterborne hazards.

To minimize worker and public health and safety risks from project construction and closure, all construction and closure work would be done using qualified personnel trained in the proper use of the appropriate, properly maintained equipment, including all appropriate safety precautions. Additionally, all activities would be conducted in a safe manner in accordance with the standards specified in Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations and the USACE Safety Manual.

The contractor would post appropriate signage and fencing to minimize potential adverse safety impacts. Appropriate signage and barriers should be in place prior to construction activities in order to alert pedestrians and motorists of project activities and changes in traffic patterns.

4.11 Traffic and Transportation

Traffic would include project workers and supply trucks; and the temporary residents and their visitors; resulting in an up to 30% local traffic increase during project construction, operation, and closure. These traffic increases would be localized and are not expected to exceed current transportation network infrastructure capacity (Personal communication, September 21, 2004, Robbyn Jennings, DeSoto County). The neighborhood to the west and south of the project site may experience temporary traffic delays when manufactured housing units are moved into and removed from the Park. This may include temporary closures along N.E. Turner Street, Fiveash Road, and/or E. Gibson Road. The contractor would post appropriate signage and fencing to minimize potential adverse safety impacts. Appropriate signage and barriers should be in place prior to construction activities in order to alert pedestrians and motorists of project activities and changes in traffic patterns

5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

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Brett Bowen	Reviewer	Environmental Liaison Officer, Disaster Field Office, FEMA Region 4 (Seven years NEPA experience)
William Straw, PhD	Final DHS/FEMA Reviewer	Regional Environmental Officer, FEMA Region 4 (15 years NEPA experience)

7.0 Public Comment and Agency Coordination

A public notice announcing the availability of the EA was placed in the DeSoto Sun-Herald and ran from September 28 to October 1, 2004. The EA was available for public review at the Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) at the DeSoto Center campus of South Florida Community College and DeSoto County Public Library in Arcadia, Florida. Electronic copies of the EA were sent to the USEPA, USFWS, NRCS, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Protected Resources and Habitat Divisions, SWFWMD, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

8.0 Literature Cited and References

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Appendix